

Message Text

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R 151500Z JAN 76

FM AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2518

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMCONSUL ISTANBUL

AMEMBASSY SOFIA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

C O N F I D E N T I A L THESSALONIKI 0017

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PDEV, GR

SUBJECT: NORTHEAST BORDER TOWNS PROTEST ALLEGED NEGLECT

1. SUMMARY. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, TOWNS OF SOUFLI, DIDIMOLIXO AND ORESTIADA ON GREEK-TURKISH BORDER IN NORTH-EASTERN GREEK THRACE WERE EFFECTIVELY SHUT DOWN JANUARY 14 IN PROTEST OVER ALLEGED NEGLECT BY GOG OF AREA'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. THIS HAS BEEN CONTINUAL GRIEVANCE OF THIS AREA, BUT PROTEST STRIKES THIS TIME WERE TOUCHED OFF BY PARLIAMENT-S CONSIDERATION OF BILL FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF BORDER AREAS WHICH RESIDENTS OF NORTHEASTERN THRACE CONSIDER INADEQUATE. THEY ARE ASKING SPECIAL CONSIDERATION BASED ON ALLEGED NEGLECT IN PAST AND AREA'S STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE. MINISTER OF NORTHERN GREECE MARTIS IN STATEMENT ISSUED YESTERDAY REJECTED PROTESTORS' ALLEGATIONS AND MAINTAINED THAT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INTERESTS OF AREA BEING FULLY CONSIDERED BY GOG. END SUMMARY.

2. JANUARY 14 PROTEST STRIKES HAD BEEN PLANNED FOR SOME TIME BY A "12-MEMBER STRUGGLE COMMITTEE" MADE UP OF MEMBERS
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OF VARIOUS COMMERCIAL AND LABOR ORGANIZATIONS AND WHICH

APPEARS TO HAVE NO POLITICAL AFFILIATION.

ORGANIZERS, IN FACT, WERE CAREFUL TO LIMIT ATTACKS ON GOG TO ALLEGED ECONOMIC NEGLECT, AND TO STRESS THEIR LOYALTY TO GREECE. MOST PROMINENT BANNER AND SLOGAN FOR PROTESTS READ: "WE ALSO BELONG TO GREECE. WE BATTLE TO SURVIVE. OUR LIFE DEVOTED TO GUARDING THE BORDER."

3. STRIKES WERE TIMED TO REINFORCE AREA'S DEMANDS, SUBMITTED IN MEMORANDUM TO ALL RELEVANT GOG AUTHORITIES, FOR SPECIAL CONSIDERATION IN BORDER AREA DEVELOPMENT BILL NOW BEFORE PARLIAMENT. MEMORANDUM WAS SPECIFICALLY DIRECTED AT AREA "NORTH OF ARDANON VILLAGE", AND NEARBY DID NOT INCLUDE ALEXANDROPOULOS, THE AREA'S LARGEST TOWN, BUT DID INCLUDE ALL OF THE AREA IN FINGER OF NORTHEASTERN GREECE BETWEEN TURKEY AND BULGARIA. AMONG SPECIAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INCENTIVES REQUESTED WERE 85 PERCENT DEVELOPMENT LOANS FOR FARMERS, 75 PERCENT REDUCTION IN NATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY PAYMENTS (IKA) FOR EMPLOYEES AND EMPLOYERS, 50 PERCENT REDUCTION IN ELECTRIC POWER CHARGES, 50 PERCENT REDUCTION IN PRICE OF LIQUID FUELS FOR AGRICULTURAL AND BUSINESS USE, AND 50 PERCENT REDUCTION IN CUSTOMS DUTIES ON AGRICULTURAL MACHINERY.

4. WITH THESE DEMANDS, IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT MINISTER MARTIS FIRMLY REJECTED PROTESTORS ALLEGATIONS OF NEGLECT AND THEIR PROPOSALS FOR REFORM. PROTEST ORGANIZERS, WHO APPEAR TO BE PRACTICAL BUSINESSMEN AND FARMERS TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THEIR UNIQUE SITUATION IN SENSITIVE LOCATION, ALSO PROBABLY EXAGGERATED THEIR DEMANDS AS OPENING GAMBIT IN A BARGAINING PROCESS. WHETHER GOG WILL BARGAIN, OR PROTEST ORGANIZERS WILL EXPAND PROTESTS TO CAUSE REAL PROBLEMS FOR GOG, REMAINS TO BE SEEN.

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